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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a new format for conducting workshops for college students on eliminating self-defeating behaviors, based on a psychoeducational approach. The content of each of the eight lunch-hour sessions is described including the learned nature of self-defeating behaviors and the tracking identification and changing of such behaviors through the use of appropriate behaviors and reinforcers. Advertisements, explanations of the model workshop, descriptions of strategies for eliminating self-defeating behaviors, and a bibliography are included. Research to determine the efficacy of the workshops in the Harford Community College setting is also described. (Author/JAC)

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ELIMINATING SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIORS:

NEW GROUP PROCEDURES

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Eliminating Self-Defeating Behaviors, a psychoeducational workshop which was started seven years ago by Dr. Nancy Stockton at Indiana University, has gained acceptance at other colleges in recent years. With each new leader of the workshop comes new approaches to presenting the material and assisting students as they put the principles into daily use. In this paper, a format which is now being used at the Counseling Center at Harford Community College is described. It is appearing to offer several advantages over earlier workshop formats, particularly because the material is chunked into shorter units, the workshop is presented over more weeks, and a method of collecting data in order to examine the efficacy of the workshop has been included.

General Outline

As was described last year at the ACPA Convention in Cincinnati (Dennett, Stockton, Cerio, & Watts, 1981), most of our Eliminating Self-Defeating Behaviors (SDB) workshops follow the same general outline, regardless of the format being used. By "format," I am referring to the length of each session, the number of sessions, the number of weeks for the workshop, and whether it is done as a lecture or as a developmental group.

The general outline is as follows:

1. What are SDBs?
2. Targeting one SDB.
3. Tracking the SDB.

4. The paradigm--how SDBs are established and maintained.
5. The model for eliminating SDBs.
6. The "how to's" for eliminating SDBs.
   a. Exiting at the thoughts exit.
   b. Exiting at the feelings exit.
   c. Exiting at the action exit.
7. Laying out a plan.
8. Enacting the plan with continued tracking of the SDB.
9. Discussions regarding the results of the enacted plan, and modification of the plan as needed (Cerio, 1982).

As with any developmental group, it is necessary to build into the workshop several basic group counseling skills. Thus, the material is presented to students in a combined didactic/experiential style. Some presenters, for example, ask participants to consider their "positive" and "not-so-positive" qualities in an initial exercise called "How Do I See Myself?" From this exercise, participants draw conclusions regarding their self-defeating behaviors and select one SDB which they will attempt to eliminate during the course of the workshop. Other presenters build into their formats a good deal of time for discussions, and obviously a counselor's basic helping skills are called into action during those moments.

The general outline presented above is largely followed in the variety of settings in which this workshop is offered. We have described the settings already (Dennett, et. al., 1981; Cerio, 1982). Current examples of settings include Steve Jenkins' continuing education course at Indiana University, Bill Dennett's resident advisor training program at Lake Forest College, Nancy Stockton's staff development workshop at Indiana University, and my counseling center workshop at Harford Community College.

Other settings have included residence hall evening programs, "Success Groups" for academic underachievers, and faculty/staff workshops for the personnel offices at colleges.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a description of the workshop which is being done for the Counseling Center at Harford.

An Eight-Week Lunchtime Program

In an attempt to present this workshop in a convenient format for community college students, it was modified to fit within several lunch hours. The first session was advertised by the Student Activities Office, and it was scheduled for a lounge in the student union. The following seven sessions were scheduled to meet at the Counseling Center.

The advertisement for the workshop was as follows:

> Self-defeating behaviors (SDBs) are learned behaviors which prevent personal growth and self-enrichment. Some examples of SDBs include: trying to be perfect, procrastination, feeling and acting inferior, holding negative thoughts about oneself, acting aggressively or non-assertively when assertion is more appropriate, and striving for unrealistic goals. In this workshop, participants will learn to identify their SDBs, what fuels their SDBs, and strategies for breaking out of SDBs, consequently allowing themselves to think, feel and behave in more self-enhancing ways.

In the first one-hour session, the participants are asked to discuss what the term "eliminating self-defeating behaviors" means to them. This elicits a group-generated definition of the term, and also helps the leader in describing the process and goals of the workshop. Participants are then

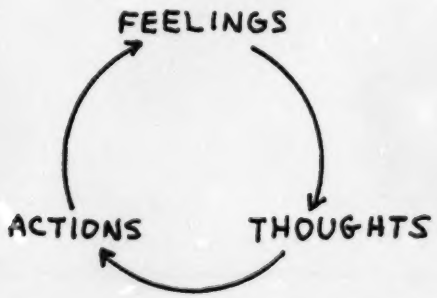
asked to list various SDBs, including those that they have "heard others talk about." Once the list is finished, the leader asks each participant to select one SDB which s/he can use as a "target behavior" for change during the workshop.

At the close of the first workshop, the students are told that it is important to "track" the occurrences of their SDBs. They are given cards and are asked to use the following format:

NAME	DAY #
AM	𝍸 II
PM	III
AFTER 5 PM	IIII

Each student is given one card for each day of the week. They are asked to keep an accurate count of the number of times they catch themselves engaging in their SDBs. The card allows the students and the leader to observe what patterns might be evident in each student's SDB.

In the second session, which occurs one week later, each participant's tracking cards are reviewed. Those students who agree to take part in the research submit total daily frequencies to the leader. Then the "Self-Defeating Behavior Circle" is introduced.



Using examples from the group, the leader demonstrates how self-defeating behaviors are composed of negative and often-times irrational thoughts, feelings, and actions which potentiate each other, resulting in a "vicious circle." The leader also tries to show how people reinforce--negatively or positively--their SDBs, or how they find reinforcement in their environment for their SDBs. The message is that self-defeating behaviors result from a vicious circle of negative thoughts, feelings, and actions which are "stamped-in" our behavioral repertoire by reinforcement. Just as these behaviors are learned, they can be unlearned (or new behaviors can be learned to replace them).

The second session ends with a description of how the remaining sessions will help the participants eliminate SDBs--by teaching strategies for "exiting" the SDB circle at one of the three points, thus breaking the negative chain of events. They are told that they will also learn how to create a "self-enhancing behavior circle" which will include reinforcement, so that they can enter this new circle once they exit from the SDB circle. The participants are reminded to continue tracking their SDBs during the next week.

In the third session, the students report the frequencies from their tracking cards. The participants are then introduced to the two methods which will be taught for exiting from the SDB circle at the thoughts exit. The first method, which is described as one in which people change their thoughts, is Ellis' "ABC's of Rational Living" (Ellis, 1973). The second method reflects Meichenbaum's cognitive-behavior modification techniques (Meichenbaum, 1977), and is described as a way of changing <u>how</u> people think. The remainder of the third hour is spent describing Ellis' model and, by using examples, demonstrating how people can dispute their irrational thoughts.

The fourth session starts by asking the participants to come up with examples of how they could apply Ellis' approach to their own SDBs. The second method described above is then introduced, and the participants learn how to "think aloud" in order to use self-instructions to guide their behaviors. A method which relies on overt self-instructions for defining personal problems and laying plans for problem resolution, called "Metathoughts for Eliminating SDBs," is presented.

Metathoughts for Eliminating SDBs

1. Ask: What is my problem?
2. Ask: What is my plan?
3. Inact the plan.
4. Ask: Is it helping?

   Yes: Continue until you confront another problem.

   No: Then,
5. Make a plan to do better.
6. Ask: Is it helping?

   Yes: Continue until you confront another problem.

   No: Then,
7. Make a better problem definition and repeat the cycle.

Though this list resembles Glasser's "Eight Steps to Reality Therapy" (Glasser, 1975), it is different from Glasser's approach because it emphasizes thinking aloud (i.e., asking and answering these questions overtly) and it notes point 5 as a spot where irrational thoughts must be fought.

As the fourth session draws to a close, participants are asked to think of ways in which they could apply the "metathoughts" approach to their SDBs. They are then asked to note on paper what method they could use to exit from the SDB circle at the thoughts exit.

Session five introduces strategies for breaking out of self-defeating behaviors at the feelings exit. After students report their SDB frequencies for the past week, they are told that people can learn to use feelings as signals that they are about to engage in self-defeating behaviors. They are also told that some people report an ability to eliminate SDBs by simply relaxing themselves once or twice a day with regularity.

The remainder of this session is spent teaching the participants how to use the Fantasy Relaxation Technique (Gunnison, 1976) in order to short-circuit panic and consequently many self-defeating behaviors. Since this involves an experiential exercise, the students leave this session with clear ideas of how they could apply this method to their self-defeating behaviors.

The sixth session introduces Benson's "Relaxation Response" as a method of reducing the effects of daily stress and consequently gaining control over negative feelings (Benson, 1976). Since many students report having anxiety-related feelings in their SDB circles, many find that simply learning how to relax and relaxing daily are quite helpful in breaking out of self-defeating behaviors. Once this material is covered, the participants discuss how they could use these methods on their own self-defeating behaviors. They then note on paper what "feelings strategy" they can attempt. Once again, the students are asked to discuss the results of their daily SDB tracking. Since at this point in the workshop the participants are beginning to experiment with these strategies, the daily incidences of SDBs are usually beginning to decline. It helps the participants to hear some sincere encouragement as they attempt to change their problem behaviors, especially during the sixth week.

In the seventh session, the Action exit is introduced. Time management strategies, goal-oriented strategies, and the principles of Reality Therapy (Glasser, 1975) are described. Many participants have found Ohlsen's (1977) description of laying goals, minigoals, and methods of evaluating progress toward goals as being especially helpful. This seems to be most applicable for those who procrastinate or delay work unless they think they can do a perfect job the first time. As with all other sessions, the students are asked to discuss how they could use these Action-exit strategies to eliminate their SDBs, and then they note on paper which strategy they can attempt.

Before the seventh session ends, each participant is encouraged to describe which strategy s/he will now systematically employ in an attempt to eliminate his/her self-defeating behavior.

When the eighth session begins, very close attention is paid to the SDB tracking cards. Comparisons are made with the frequencies reported in the earlier weeks of the workshop. When these objective data are not demonstrating declines in SDB frequency for a participant, the leader and other students try to help the participant "fine-tune" a strategy to eliminate the self-defeating behavior. Subjective information is also obtained, such as answers to questions like, What strategy <u>felt</u> the <u>most comfortable/difficult</u> for you to use? Do you <u>think</u> you are making progress? What modifications need to be made in your attempts to exit from the SDB circle, now that you have begun enacting a strategy? What strategy is most fun to use?

Finally, the participants are reminded that the tools which they have now learned for eliminating one self-defeating behavior can be applied to other self-defeating behaviors. They are encouraged to continue a self-

modification program, and as they need assistance, they are encouraged to make use of a counselor at the Counseling Center. When a follow-up session appears necessary, it is usually scheduled for one month following the last workshop session.

Research

Earlier in this paper it was mentioned that a study is under way at Harford Community College to examine the efficacy of the Eliminating Self-Defeating Behaviors workshop. The daily frequencies from the tracking cards of students who have agreed to participate in the study are being recorded throughout the eight weeks of the workshop. Data will be collected from workshop participants through the spring, 1983 semester, and the results of this study will be reported at a later date.

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